



EPISODE 10: PODCAST TRANSCRIPT

## AWE, ART AND OBSERVATION: BONNIE PITMAN

DISTINGUISHED SCHOLAR IN RESIDENCE, ART HISTORIAN, ART AND  
BRAIN INNOVATIONS AT U.T. DALLAS

---

LISTEN AT: [www.rise-leaders.com/podcast](http://www.rise-leaders.com/podcast)

---

[INTRODUCTION]

**[0:00:11.1] LM:** Welcome to Rise Leaders Radio. This podcast focuses on exemplary leadership, the type of leadership that brings about positive, meaningful change in places that matter. We explore how these leaders make things happen and the lessons they learned along the way. I'm your host, LeeAnn Mallory.

Today's conversation is with a truly extraordinary woman, [Bonnie Pitman](#). As she continues to reinvent herself, she integrates more and more perspectives into her work. We'll be talking today about art, neuroscience, learning, wellbeing, resilience and self-compassion.

Before I go about introducing Bonnie, I want to set some context. Last fall, I began using an instrument that assesses wellbeing. It's called the [Be Well Lead Well Pulse](#) assessment and it's based on six dimensions of well-being: Thriving, Wonder, wisdom, Fuel, Flow and Thriving Amplified.

The dimension of wonder is super interesting to me and where we focus our conversation today. Wonder includes awe, appreciation and gratitude. As I mention late in the podcast, the field of neuroscience is finding that when we're in a state of awe, we're more likely to feel present and connected to the world around us and less likely to engage in rumination and feeling stressed. Bonnie is going to talk about two practices that she has developed that support the feeling of wonder and awe: [Do Something New](#) and [The Power of Observation Framework](#).

First, a bit about Bonnie. She's the Distinguished Scholar in Residence for the Edith O'Donnell Institute of Art History at the University of Texas at Dallas and also Director of Art and Brain Innovations at the U.T. Dallas Center for Brain Health. Bonnie's the former director of the [Dallas Museum of Art](#) and author of six books that are primarily focused on public engagement with art, which continues to be a huge passion of hers.

She left the DMA in 2012 due to serious health issues that resulted from cross-Atlantic travel. The challenges are significant and require weekly attention at medical facilities and limiting her exposure to big crowds and germey people. In true Bonnie fashion, this health condition not only didn't stop her, it catalyzed the creation of the next version of herself.

I came across this quote that exemplifies how Bonnie feels about the connection of art and people. "I want people to be inspired by the cultural history of art over time and throughout the world. Art is a chronicle of human experience. If you can learn to open your heart and mind to it, it can be like a three-dimensional encyclopedia." I love this quote and connect really deeply with it.

We pick up the interview here with an expression of gratitude towards Bonnie. I also want to remind you now before we get started that there are a lot of links in the show notes, because we mentioned a lot of resources, as well as a download of the power of observation framework.

[INTERVIEW]

**[0:03:54] LM:** Thank you for putting into words my feelings. And why I want to take leadership teams and more people into the museums is because I think art puts things into perspective and it gives us a different way to experience things and to get out of our heads, and really see things over a long arc of time. And beauty. My opinion is we don't spend enough time appreciating beauty.

**[0:04:21] BP:** Beauty is everywhere. If we don't stop and celebrate it and enjoy those moments of awe and wonder, you're missing a great component of life.

**[0:04:31] LM:** Yes. I'm so glad that you brought that up, because another thing that meeting you has just been so serendipitous, I'm also very interested in awe and wonder and leadership and well-being.

You're already years ahead of me with frameworks that you've created that helped put those things together. I'm just seeing all these different frameworks come together.

A little bit more history; so you left the Dallas Museum of Art in 2012 due to some significant health issues that you still deal with. You spend a lot of time and energy even today - weekly, managing all of the health issues. It was this time in life that actually someone said – brought you to another iteration of your reinvention. Because of your experience and with this illness, you've created a whole new world for yourself. I wonder if you could just start there and tell us how you moved from that part in life, I think it began in 2008, to being focused on awe and its impact on health. Just start there.

**[0:05:46] BP:** Well, happily the beauty of art and awe and wonder have been a part of my life, period. Ever since I was a little girl, I was in love with paintings and sculptures. And my grandparents - my mother were huge influences on me taking me tirelessly to museums. I had a bunch of brothers and they couldn't have cared less about going to art museums, but my mom and my grandmother and grandfather really supported that.

Going back to your question, about 2008 I was in Europe negotiating an exhibition for the Dallas Museum of Art. I went to Vienna and London. In Vienna in particular, I picked up a virus that at the time, we thought was just the flu. When I came back and everybody was trying to treat me, but there was this problem, I just didn't get better. I coughed and coughed as I still do today. My physicians were really stumped by this.

When they did the biopsies on my lungs, they found a mysterious organism. There are only two people in the United States now that have this, which is strange. This person also was in Vienna at the same time, so it just means our immune systems were receptive to this little bug that was going around out there. At any rate, it's found a happy home and it stays with me. Despite all the treatments from great medical centers around the United States, I've learned how to manage it. I'm not going to be cured.

Those years, 2008 until I left in 2012 were really challenging years, because I would go to the museum and we'd have an event, or an opening, or things like that and two days later, I'd be in the hospital again, because my immune system – somebody would be sick and I would get their infection. The combination of just the exhaustion of being chronically ill, the receptivity of getting ill all the time just by traveling and doing my job was really frustrating.

I made a decision with my physician to step down from my role as the Director of the Dallas Museum of Art. What he said, which was pretty powerful at the time, “Now I think we have a chance of keeping you alive,” was pretty startling. I said, “Oh. Well, you could have told me that earlier.” He's been my physician since 2008.

What happened was in the summer of 2011 - so I had been sick for a while, that we had another biopsy. The biopsy came back and clearly indicated that I had this – the infection was still there. It was very upsetting, because I had been through so many treatments and so many hospitalizations I thought, ‘surely, I’m getting better’. Unfortunately, I wasn't. I had to embrace that new understanding in my life.

I went home that afternoon from learning this news and my brother was with me happily, thank heavens. I said to my brother, Mark, I'm going to take a nap. When I woke up from my nap, I wrote down my Do Something New practice, which was - it was July the 8<sup>th</sup>, 2011. I said, “I'm going to take an ordinary day and make it extraordinary through the power of intention. I will meet new people. I will go to new places. I will do new things with old friends.” It can be big or little, so that allows flexibility in my life, because on what I call *quiet days*, or *sick days*, I can't go out and do a lot. I have to do something here. It can be new flavors of ice cream, which is really great. I don't know why I wrote that down, but it cannot be work and it cannot be medical, and it cannot be something that I carry forward. If I do a bunch of things in one day, I can't carry forward them to the next day.

**[0:09.36] LM:** Okay. For me, being with you in your place, interviewing you for this podcast on a Sunday, this is a beautiful – I wish everyone could see your beautiful home here with all the art. Do I get to count that as do something new –

**[0:09.48] BP:** Yeah, absolutely.

**[0:09.50] LM:** - even though it's work?

**[0:09.52] BP:** Oh, no. Yeah. I mean, you can choose that. These are my parameters.

**[0:09.57] LM:** Okay. All right. We can create our own parameters. Okay.

**[0:09:59] BP:** When I teach this practice, I tell everybody, “This is what I wrote down. You should write down what you want it to be and not be in any way encumbered.” Yes. Being here, is if this is new to you, and doing – for me, it's the joy of consciously choosing to have deep experiences hopefully during the day multiple times, where I just pause and refocus and say, “Oh, this is my do something new today. I'm going to really try to see the different works of art in this person's home.”

I was at a luncheon last week and took 30 photographs of a friend's chairs and tables and her eggs in a bowl and everything and then I sent her this collage I posted on Instagram. She said, “I've never seen my house that way.” She says, “I had no idea that those were in there.”

**[0:10:52] LM:** Oh, interesting.

**[0:10:54] BP:** What it does for me is it causes me to focus deeply on the moment and to begin to – I would say to you that she loves lines and she didn't really understand that, that a lot of her art is not color, it's about lines and structure. This pattern reflects everything all the way down to her dining room table with all the scratches and weathering that's happened.

It's a way for me to just stop in the rush of things and celebrate the beauty of things, to really have joy. Or it could be in a conversation. One of my favorite things is to... an old friend is coming over for dinner tonight and I very intentionally called her, because she's had this experience before and said, “You're part of my Do Something New today.” Julie said, “Oh, Bonnie we've known each other for so many years.” I said, “Yeah, just be prepared. I'm going to learn new things about you.”

A lot of my friends who have been part of my practice for years know that when I tell them, “you're part of the practice” that day that something's going to happen. Yeah, something's going to happen. It's learning about people and in depth, not just the surface of it.

We had a discussion when we first met one day at the [Arboretum](#) and a cardinal was sitting in a tree above our heads and we talked about our mothers, both of whom had died. That red cardinal stayed there in the tree until this hour-long conversation was completed, that we had shared these stories of how much we loved our mothers and how much we fought with our mothers and all of these different things.

In that moment, in that very special moment of communing with a friend and changing your relationship from being casual friends to really sharing life stories was extraordinary. At the end, the cardinal flew away.

**[0:12:49] LM:** You were paying attention to that.

**[0:12:50] BP:** We were paying attention to that.

**[0:12:52] LM:** Well, the other thing that strikes me about you sending all those photos and aren't iPhones great?

**[0:12:58] BP:** Oh, I love it.

**[0:12:59] LM:** I mean, you just always have a camera and it's so easy. You were doing another kind of listening and reflecting back to her something that you saw that she didn't see. That is so gratifying, because we talk all the time, but you really were paying attention to her in a different way. Now she can see, she learned something about herself by you sharing what you saw. And it's such a gift.

**[0:13:30] BP:** Well, and she was thrilled by this, because we don't often have opportunities where somebody really reflects on you and learns from you. I did. I learned a huge amount from her about her books and her – this neutrality of color that she loves grays and greens, but soft colors, but that's not the way she dresses. She dresses very colorfully. There were all these contrasts.

Anyway, those simple things, what Do Something New is really about is having the courage to take a moment and really celebrate it and finding a way in my life to move beyond simply seeing and looking to really deep observation, or deep as you just said, deep listening. It's about going further than I normally would. Of course, that can be translated in a thousand different ways.

**[0:14:27] LM:** You just woke up one morning and it was just there.

**[0:14:31] BP:** I wrote it down. Yeah, I can show you the page that – I wrote it down on a piece of paper. Yeah, this is exactly what I wrote. I woke up and I have a pad by my bed. I don't know about you, but –

**[0:14:43] LM:** That's fascinating. The other thing is what our brains are doing and what our minds are doing when we're sleeping and to capture that. What if you had not captured that and then we may not have it.

**[0:14:52] BP:** I wouldn't have had – I mean, here we are on day 3,000 – I think it's 3,000 or 3,022 or something like that –

**[0:15:01] LM:** Days now?

**[0:15:04] BP:** Now. Yeah. It's a great question. I mean, the first couple of days, because Mark was with me, we did things like we played miniature golf. It was 105°, so it was really stupid. We went for a walk out at the [Audubon](#) and got lost, because we didn't pay attention to the trails. I never pay attention to markers, things like that. I just head out in the world.

**[0:15:25] LM:** Experiment.

**[0:15:26] BP:** Experiment with the world. Then we went to a *Transformer* movie. I realized that after three days, oh, I could really find something. We had duck races in my – I collect rubber duckies, so we had duck races in my pool. These were not –

**[0:15:45] LM:** They don't have to be profound.

**[0:15:46] BP:** No. These were not profound things, but they have gotten to be profound. More importantly, the discoveries of having done this practice for so long are really profound. In other words, you can take all these little incidents together. I've discovered that one of the really important things, which we've been talking about, comes from my meditation practice is the power of staying in the moment and just seeing old things in new ways, or just seeing the world in new ways, to slow down and really invest in those moments and to - just like when you're meditating, focus on your breathing, focus on the people or the place.

I've learned, really affirmed the importance of compassion. Compassion not only to others, which is in many ways the easiest thing to do, but much easier than being self-compassionate. When you're chronically ill, self-compassion is hard work, because you're angry. I was angry; really, really angry for years at my body and at myself. I've given that up. Now through the practice of Loving Kindness,

which [Sharon Salzberg](#) have taught me so much about, I don't fight with my body anymore. I just accept this is a good day, this is a sick day, better known as a quiet day. I can wake up in the morning and feel great. At 3:00 in the afternoon, crawl back in bed and think, I'm never going to get out of this bed. I may be in that bed for three or four days.

**[0:17:16] LM:** Interesting.

**[0:17:17] BP:** Self-compassion has been a big thing. Play, the importance of play and playing with my friends, playing with myself in terms of doing things around the house. I have a whole drawer of games and little things I can do. Sometimes I call up my friends and say, "Okay, we have a new game and you have to come over and play it with me." Or just being playful I think is really the celebration of the human experience. That's how children learn. Even though I'm much older now, it's a way for me to reengage in new things.

**[0:17:51] LM:** Yeah. You mentioned Sharon Salzberg and I've lifted one of her phrases. She and [Joseph Goldstein](#) use the phrase "Begin Again" as part of the meditation and coming back to your breath every day –

**[0:18:03] BP:** Is to begin again.

**[0:18:04] LM:** Is to begin again. Every moment is to begin again. We have multiple times in days and life to begin again. It sounds like that's also what you're incorporating in there.

**[0:18:14] BP:** Well, of course. Both Joseph Goldstein and Sharon have been – along with [Jon Kabat-Zinn](#), I've been around them a lot in terms ... I've been very fortunate to be able to go to teaching sessions with them and their friends. The *begin again* is at the very essence of what Do Something New is. It's about the full presence of, 'okay, I did that and I'm over with, but how can I begin again?' Just your wandering mind when you're meditating. It's perfectly natural to do that. Just to save your breath and come back to that moment.

**[0:18:47] LM:** Be compassionate with yourself when that happens.

**[0:18:48] BP:** Yes.



**[0:18:50] LM:** Just that whole cycle is a practice of self-compassion too. It was not being angry with yourself when your mind wanders.

**[0:18:56] BP:** Right. I have to say, I learned self-compassion through my meditation and then began to really apply it to my physical body's – the frailty of my physical body. A wonderful intersection of the two.

**[0:19:10] LM:** Nice. Nice. Can we talk a little bit now about – I know that you're doing a lot of work with art and medicine. In fact, I've heard I heard you speak at [The Nasher](#). You did a whole series there where you facilitated conversations with physicians and neuroscientist and all of that on art and health. And you do your Power of Observation framework; specifically, you've started with physicians. What's all that link there?

**[0:19:43] BP:** Well, if you were in the hospital and in clinics as much as I was in 2008 to 2012, I had to look for new ways of thinking about the world around me, because it was shifting. The shift was happening as a result of my not being able to travel as much and being more in Dallas and particularly, more at Baylor. In a single week, I could be there - two times is normal, but three to five times during the week.

**[0:20:15] LM:** That's even today.

**[0:20:16] BP:** Oh, yeah.

**[0:21:29.5] LM:** Yeah, that's today.

**[0:21:31.1] BP:** Last week we were there for infusions and shots and new blood work and a major appointment with my physician to try to figure out why I was having a blood infection. It just goes on and on. Some people would give up, but that's not my nature. What I would say is the practice of Doing Something New every day has developed my creative resilience. And that that creative resilience is I've always been resilient, but now I know how to do it creatively. I know how to do it with compassion towards myself. I am much better at that than when I was in the beginning in 2008 to 12.

It's really developed in the last two or three years that I understand it now. Well, I've been doing it for a long time, eight years. That led into, because I was in the hospitals, I was talking to doctors, I was

an art historian and would have conversations about we've got to fix this environment that really is in desperate need of new images on the walls. How can I train the physicians?

I did a number of talks at Baylor and UT Southwestern, because I know I'm on committees for both of the hospitals, about my practice of Doing Something New. Then the doctors said, "Well, we want to learn how to see the world the way you do." I went, "Oh. Well, I hadn't thought about that the same way."

**[0:21:46] LM:** That's a prerequisite skill to Doing Something New, or no?

**[0:21:51] BP:** No, I don't think so. I think what they were – their world and many physicians, both medical students and after they become doctors and go through the various stages of their training and then they're operating as a full physician, it's like everybody – they're not trained in how to observe the world around them. They're not trained in the skills that we need for visual literacy, any more than we're trained to learn how to hear.

Yeah, 80% of the way you acquire information is through visual images. Particularly important for physicians is that ability to see if a patient over the days that they are seeing them in the hospital, or in their clinics is evolving in a positive way, or a negative way. That need to be able to look quickly and observe quickly and get solid information, to be able to remember it is something that's very important for them.

I was stunned in the beginning that everybody didn't know how to do what I was doing, because I've been doing it professionally through my museum career my entire life. The physicians really and the students, medical students really said, "You need to write this down. You need to help us," because they learn through real science and through methodologies that are quite different in many ways than the humanities. They wanted something concrete that could help them and my mushy waving of hands and being enthusiastic was great, but not enough.

Again, I mean, these are funny stories. I was wandering around. I was on a walk. Then when I came home for the walk, I took a nap and wrote down the framework for The Power of Observation. I woke up. It's evolved over the three years I've been working on it, but it was basically oh, there are four levels. We start with scanning the world around us, then we look more deeply. We attend to that and

try to not analyze and create a judgment, but just like, “Oh, this is a microphone and a blue glass. Oh, there are two of them and we're matching, but they're in different places.” We're just attending.

Then to make connections and the connections are really getting more information learning from you. This is your podcast equipment. You begin to then connect my life to your life. I create some experiential understandings. I make values. This is when context is given to your observation. That's connecting.

Then the last one which was hard to come up with a word for is really transforming. Transforming is when you personalize these actions and you take all this information and then you can put it into a new idea and the doctors were the ones who pointed out to me, “This is when we make a new diagnosis. We've got all this information. We've really looked at it, but we may think that you've had X, but now we're making you the diagnosis and it could be Y, or we change our points of view.”

Then I began to work with it and once I was at the [Center for Brain Health](#), I began to realize how very critical the senses were in learning. As I've been teaching the framework for The Power of Observation, I now use sensory learning as much as possible, so it's not just your eyes, but I get your full body involved in it. In transformation, we do these activities that make specific connections between the personal. You might write a poem, you might act out if you're with me in the museum. I have people acting out what's going on in the painting and then you figure out what was happening before, what was after.

Those tangible, experiential moments transform a two-dimensional experience into memory in your brain. Now your hippocampus, your whole limbic system is working in a different way and at a higher level to codify this memory as one that you're going to hold on to.

**[0:26:02] LM:** Okay. I just want to pause here. A few things that you've said; first of all, love the term visual literacy. We have literacy on a lot of different things, but I had not heard visual literacy. It's something to be paid attention to. Like you said, 80% -

**[0:26:19] BP:** 80% of what we learn is through our eyes.

**[0:26:20] LM:** Of what we learn is through our eyes. We can be very transactional about it and not ask questions, or we can get to a next level where we make meaning of it. We transform that image

into something that's meaningful. I'm going to say again just the four levels, or the – what are they?  
The four dimensions of the –

**[0:26:43] BP:** Four levels. I don't think of them as levels, but four aspects.

**[0:26:46] LM:** Four aspects. They are Scanning, Attending, Connecting and Transforming. Those are the four aspects of the framework that you came up with. I want to say something else. I did the [SMART](#) program from [BPI](#) and it reminds me of Zoom In, Zoom Out, Zoom Deep and Wide. It feels a little bit like that too. Is there a connection between those two?

**[0:27:13] BP:** Well, it's very interesting because I had written my framework and [Sandy Chapman](#) is a friend of mine and I had not read her book about the SMART learning program that she developed. Sandy invited me over to come and show her *The Power of Observation*. She said, "Oh, Bonnie. Do you know about my SMART framework?" There are parallels between the two. There's also parallels.

I have a little chart that I made, because I love charts that shows *Power of Observation*, *Do Something New* and then SMART, because all of them have these, in my mind, have different ways of experiencing the world around what *The Power of Observation* and *Do Something New* that helps the work that the Center for Brain Health does in terms of learning and the SMART program itself is it adds content. It adds deep meaning to what you're doing. That is, I think they used the word innovation, as opposed to transforming, if I remember correctly in the last level.

The framework for *The Power of Observation*, we developed in – it's one of those things that happens in the world all the time that two people are thinking about the same thing and come up with different answers. Sandy Chapman's and the work at the Center for Brain Health is very heavily based on research, cognitive learning, has been tested. They have a whole methodology for it. That's one of the reasons she brought me to the Center for Brain Health is to –

**[0:28:43] LM:** Because you're bringing a different aspect.

**[0:28:44] BP:** I'm bringing another lens to look at this and with both the *Do Something New* practice and *The Power of Observation*. I lecture there all the time on those subjects.

**[0:28:54] LM:** I want to say too that in the show notes, I will – I know that you have a website for Do Something New. I'll point to that in your [Instagram](#), because your –

**[0:29:03] BP:** Right. The Instagram account is current. The [blog](#) is really helpful, because it explains Do Something New, but it doesn't have the daily link to Instagram. You can definitely get people the Instagram account.

**[0:29:16] LM:** All right. I'll give all of that. If it's okay with you, I'll also let people download a PDF of the –

**[0:29:22] BP:** Yeah, definitely. This is the more current – We edited it down just a little bit. The great land of – the debates on this language. Just enough.

**[0:29:35] LM:** The bottom line is that I'll link people to this framework. I'm wondering, I have the story that there are so many ways that this could be used in a business setting, like if you're looking at issues, or problems, or new things that you're trying to create. You could go through this framework individually, or as a group. In fact, it might be fun to do it all individually and then compare what people have, what they've come up with.

On two of these at least, it says make no judgment. Continue to look without judgment, so that it's taking the critical eye and the analysis off of it and just let yourself play around with it and be with whatever the issue is, whatever it is that you're contemplating, whether it's a piece of art, or a business issue.

**[0:30:27] BP:** Well, this I've used actually and work the Scanning, Attending, Connecting, Transforming. I'm not as explicit about it, but I've used it in workshops that I've done with leaders to have – it's another equivalent to a brainstorming session. We're going to brainstorm. Let's just take a specific thing that we're focusing on as a problem and go through these steps. You can move the group from this generalizing the problem, down to coming up with new solutions.

You're right. It has many applications, many, many applications. I teach a course as you know to physicians a number of hospitals here in Dallas and I've done it with Southwest Airlines and a number of other corporations, where they found it to be very successful. I think as the Center for Brain

Performance develops, it will be a project that I develop for more – hopefully, for more use in corporations and other resources that are out there.

**[0:31:29] LM:** Great. I will be glad to see that. Yeah.

**[0:31:32] BP:** I'm doing a lecture on March. I'll have to send you the date. We can note about that at the Center for Brain Health. I think it's on Do Something New.

**[0:31:41] LM:** Okay, so that people who are in the area, or if they're –

**[0:31:44] BP:** Can join in. Yeah.

**[0:31:46] LM:** Can join in. It will be an evening, like they do –

**[0:31:47] BP:** It will be 11:00. Yes, an evening one. That would be anybody can just go online and buy a ticket and come on then on as we say.

**[0:31:53] LM:** Okay. Great. One more thing that I want to talk about is the [Speechless: Different by Design](#), which is an exhibit that's at the DMA now. You consulted on that along with a curator from the DMA, Sarah and with the neuroscientist at the –

**[0:32:14] BP:** BPI.

**[0:32:15] LM:** Also the artist. Was it five different artists?

**[0:32:17] BP:** Seven.

**[0:32:18] LM:** Seven different artists. All right. It's a really different type of exhibit. It's very hands-on. I actually took a group of leaders through that and the timing was just perfect, because I had been to your lecture the night before and you had art tutored me a little bit on how to do this already. It was so well-received. The leaders that were in that program just adored it.

**[0:32:46] BP:** Oh, wow. Great.

**[0:32:47] LM:** It was a combination of being out of the office and just the joy, the play. We actually did this. You basically said – you told me how to walk people through it and we did a scan first. Then when I let them know a little bit more about the exhibit, they could decide where they wanted to spend more time and engaged with it in a whole different way and had a lot more fun. They may have started out one place, but they actually found more joy somewhere else once they knew a little bit more about it. You wanted to say a few things about that exhibit?

**[0:33:22] BP:** Sure. Yeah. It's an extraordinary achievement and [Sarah Schleuning](#), who is the Chief Curator of Decorative Arts and Design, this is an idea she came to Dallas with from her previous museum at the [High Museum in Atlanta](#). Sarah wanted to do this great project. She had a lot of personal motivation. Her son has learning differences. She came to me and said, "Who do we connect with? How do we get going here?"

One of my skills is taking people from different contexts and putting them into new places. I said, "Oh, this is easy. Let's put together an advisory group and there are some wonderful people at the Center for Brain Health that we can connect with." She was so excited, because she had just gotten into understanding the neuroscience behind this. We had a wonderful convening very early on in the project, very, very early on with all of the artists and all of the neuroscientists. I think there were six or seven of them, and also a person from [Collier Hearing Center](#) and some others. There was a variety of scientists involved in this.

They presented in this session how the brain works, what is sensory learning, where does that evolve in your brain and what areas does that manifest and what is autism, what is some of the real learning differences that will require you to understand those issues in your works? There are two works in there that are very dependent on sound. They have to figure out how to do that for a person who may have a hearing deficit.

It was fascinating and the artists were blown out of their minds about how different this was than anything else. They went off, the artists went off and collaborated. The scientists went off and went back to work. Then about a number of months later, maybe nine months later, because they were working on their designs they came back and showed the scientists what was going on - the advisory group. They got a lot of feedback, which you see in this exhibition. It was very powerful, because one of them for example, the area that Ari did with the balloons that inflate and fall, they reminded them

that sound would be – you have to pick what the experience is. With these huge balloons floating, inflating, there's a lot of sound in that one.

The sound plus the membranes pressing against you, plus this could be a sensory overload. In the earlier version of this, some important changes were made to soften it. Each of the artists learned something new about themselves and found that the neuroscientists added insight into their work. The dialogues and also, they were personal dialogues. Of course, some of the people made real connections with Tandra, or at the center, and that artist would then speak to her personally. It was a wonderful transformation for both sides.

The neuroscientists, I think almost everybody who was on the team and certainly many, many other people at the Center for Brain Health made the scrolls for the [Ladd exhibition](#). If you look at the thousand plus people that made those scrolls from the Dallas community, you'll see dozens of Center for Brain Health. Here are all these scientists and they still come up to me and say, “When can we have another project like this?” Because it got them, just like you were talking about your CEOs out of their labs and into experiencing. Each of those rolls that you made with a Ladd brothers, you told stories.

They're just not colorful rolls, they're really memories. That is a memory palace that you're walking into. There's one in there that is a memory about – that I got up and told the whole group about my mom. Each person, when you make your scroll, you're thinking about a person in your life and you are selecting the colors and telling the story and then you share it with a group. Now that's not present in the exhibition, but its presence is felt in the installation.

**[0:37:29] LM:** I agree. I agree that for some reason, people – well, it's so tactile. You take your shoes off and you go into that space. You can touch it. People were laying down.

**[0:37:39] BP:** Down on it.

**[0:37:40] LM:** Laying down on. You do feel something special in there and more than just rolled up pieces of fabric. It's more than rolled up webbing. There's something different that I couldn't quite put my finger on, but maybe that's it.



**[0:37:55] BP:** That's the stories, that each one of those represents an individual who made it and a story about their lives and usually, about other people that were connected to them. The power of that is the power of art, that the human connection happens even in the most simple selection of colors and making a simple scroll. That goes back to ancient times when we made those scrolls and the scroll is when you do those kinds of – oh, I can't remember. There's a particular – it's like the inside of a shell. There's a particular term for it, which escapes me right now, but it is one of the great, old forms about the story of the universe.

**[0:38:37] LM:** It's a spiral shape.

**[0:38:38] BP:** Yes, spiral shape. Yeah. You in a spiral shape.

**[0:38:42] LM:** Right. Because we're not videotaping this, no one else is going to be able to see you drawing on the table.

**[0:38:46] BP:** I kept drawing spirals on the table, but there's an actual science word that describes those spirals. The spiral is a very powerful image and you see it throughout the history of art. It's brought into a wonderful new focus. All right new.

**[0:39:02] LM:** Yeah. Well, I know that there's more and more science being done on art. Actually, maybe it was Dee from the Center for Brain Health had told me about this [article](#), and I'll put all of this in the show notes, but it was the research was in a science journal, [Human Brain Mapping](#). It revealed that awe may help stop us from ruminating on our problems and daily stressors. Instead, awe seems to pull us out of ourselves and make us feel immersed in our surroundings and the larger world, which may also help explain its tendency to inspire generosity and a sense of connection with others.

**[0:39:48] BP:** Wow. That's great.

**[0:39:50] LM:** Yes. I'll link it and I'll send it directly to you. You're saying that you created The Power of Observation framework based on your work in art and your experience, all of your experiences. Science is creating something else. They validate each other, or they ground each other. The science grounds the experience and experience grounds the science. It's just beautiful.

**[0:40:16] BP:** Exactly correct. A couple of years ago, the annual 'what is my new year's resolution' thing, which I'll lose 20 pounds. I'm going to save 20% of my income, blah, blah, blah, which I have failed to do for years. What I did decide one year, three years ago was to live life with joy. It's one of the discoveries out of my Do Something New practice. To live life with joy, that's it. If I'm not being joyful, if I'm not really happy in a moment, guess what? I have absolute permission to get up and leave.

Sometimes it's very difficult and sometimes I do have to suffer through the bad meetings to get to the joyful parts. Boy when you live your life that way is that is your morning affirmation, awe and wonder are very much a part of that experience all day long. You seek them out, which is different than they just happen to you. That is why I think both Do Something New is such a driving force at my own personal life as a practice, because it's something I strive for on a daily level is to – you have those peak moments, where I'm transformed.

The Power of Observation, what came from that as a way to help others begin to learn how to see – somebody said, "I want to see like you see." I go, "You don't actually see with your eyes. You see with your brain." It's all the images come into your eye, the colors and the lights and the rods and the cones and then it goes in your optic nerve, but you haven't seen anything. It's not until it gets into your brain.

**[0:41:54] LM:** Well and our brain is all over our body, which is another thing that's happening is that we're finding that we've got three, the head and the heart and the gut. There are neural pathways in all of these.

**[0:42:05] BP:** Neural pathways in all of that. It's really in those moments of – It's in that transformation of the hundreds of thousands of images that you see every day, that how you select out, how you focus in, what you're choose to have as that experience in the day is something you can train for and be open to. That's why for me, they're different to Do Something New and The Power of Observation. They live in different – but they are fundamentally conjoined. One is a practice of my life and one is a way in which to share with others how you can begin to have those experiences.

**[0:42:44] LM:** Yeah. In a sense you've objectified what comes naturally for you, in a way then that you could share it and particularly, in a way that was meaningful for people that didn't want to see you

waving your hands and all that. They wanted something really concrete. You went to sleep and woke up.

**[0:43:01] BP:** Yeah, it's a very good thing for me to go to sleep and wake up.

**[0:43:04] LM:** Yeah, all of us, all of us. Well, this feels like a good time to stop. This has been delightful. Now my word, before I knew Do Something New and wonder and awe was the feeling of being delighted. I would know, it's a full-body feeling of this being delighted. That's what I'm feeling right now. Thank you so much –

**[0:43:24] BP:** You're welcome.

**[0:43:25] LM:** - for this time and inviting me into your beautiful space here and taking the time. Like I said, I'll put in the notes how people get their hands on this and as well as your talk at Brain Performance Institute in March. We'll get that out there.

**[0:43:41] BP:** Great.

**[0:43:42] LM:** Yeah, thank you. This has been beautiful.

**[0:43:44] BP:** Terrific.

**[0:43:45] LM:** All right.

**[0:43:46] BP:** I really enjoyed it.

**[0:43:47] LM:** All right. Thank you, Bonnie.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

**[0:45:07.5] LM:** If you like what you heard today and the direction this podcast is pointed, subscribe to Rise Leaders Radio on iTunes, leave us a comment and a five-star rating. You can also check out the Rise Leaders website at [www.rise-leaders.com](http://www.rise-leaders.com) to find the resources I co-fund in my coaching and consulting work and that I find central to transformative leadership.

If you're committed to leading with a clear vision and from core values and taking your team to the next level, then get in touch. You could reach me, Leeann Mallory, from my website. I'd be honored to hear from you. I appreciate you tuning in today and especially for being the type of person interested in learning more about how you could elevate your part of the world. Take good care.

[END]